EQUIVALENCE AND CONTEMPORARY EQUIVALENCE THEORIES

Кугай К. Б.

Украина, Киев, Киевский национальный университет технологий и дизайна

The aim of this article is to review the theory of equivalence as interpreted by some of the most innovative theorists in this field. The concept of equivalence is analysed in terms of its importance in translation.

There are many discussions of the term "equivalence" in translation. The proponents of this notion such as E. Nida, P. Newmark, R. Jakobson, M. Bayar and others try to define its nature, types and also compare its degrees as a crucial subject of research in translation, whereas other opponents like van den Broek, M. Mehrach and Leuven-Zwart consider it as an impossible point for the translator to reach, and a hindering matter in the development of translation theory.

I will try to shed as much light as possible on theories and writings that have dealt with the notion of equivalence.

In fact, the increase in studying equivalence in translation coincides with the birth of a strong wave of research in machine translation. Leuven-Zwart states:

"It (equivalence) was used then in its strict scientific sense, to refer to an absolute symmetrical relationship between words of different languages" [3, p.14 cited by Mehrach].

That is, the aim of researchers to develop automatic translation led to concentration on the equivalent effects that exist between words from different languages, hence the growth of equivalence studies.

The Russian-born American structuralist R. Jakobson is considered to be one of the earliest theorists who were occupied by the study of equivalence in meaning. Jakobson claims that there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code units [4,p.36]. He also points out that the problem of both meaning and equivalence is related to the differences between structures, terminology, grammar and lexical forms of languages. Jakobson states that equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics [4,p.37].

In his work on Bible translation, Nida concentrates on studying meaning in both its semantic and pragmatic natures. He breaks with the old stories, which regard the meanings of words as fixed and unchanged, to give meaning a more functional nature. For him, words get their meanings according to the context and can be changed through the culture in which they

are used. Needless to say that Nida distinguishes between many types of meaning: linguistic meaning, referential meaning and emotive meaning [4,p.38].

Besides, Nida's concept of meaning in translation is, to some extent, influenced by N. Chomsky's theory of "generative transformational model". The latter theory focuses on the universal features of human language. For Chomsky, each language is composed of a deep structure that undergoes the process of transformations and a surface structure produced by these transformations and is subject to phonological and morphophonemic rules.

Nida's theory of translation is characterized by the distinction between two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. For formal equivalence, the translator focuses on the message itself, that is, its form and content, and there should be a close similarity between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) message [5,p.159]. In the same context, J. Munday, points out that "gloss translation" with scholarly "footnotes" are the most typical of formal equivalence as they allow the student to understand the source culture language and customs [4,p.41].

Nida gives paramount importance to the notion of "naturalness". He claims that the main aim of "equivalent effect" is to achieve the closest natural equivalent to the source language. Actually, "naturalness" as a basic keyword in Nida's theory relies on the adaptation of grammar, cultural references and lexicon of the ST. It goes without saying that Nida privileges the preservation of the text meaning on its style since it allows the translator to create the same equivalent effects.

The other figure of translation theorists who devotes a great deal of research to the notion of equivalence is W. Koller. He distinguishes between five types of equivalence: denotative equivalence refers to the case where the ST and the TT have the same denotations, that is conveying the same extra linguistic facts; connotative equivalence, also referred to as stylistic equivalence, is related to the lexical choices between near synonyms; text normative refers to text types, i.e., the description and analysis of a variety of texts behaving differently; pragmatic equivalence, also called communicative equivalence, is oriented towards the receptor of the text, as he should receive the same effect that the original text produces on its readers; formal equivalence, may also be referred to as expressive equivalence, is related to the word-for-word rendition of forms, aesthetic and stylistic features of the ST [4,p.47]. It goes without saying that Koller devotes a large part of his research to the examination of the relation between equivalence and correspondence.

The term "equivalence" continues to be a central issue for many years. Theorists and scholars try to define it as a way to enhance its role in translation. Translation equivalence

occurs when the SL (source language) and the TL (target language) texts or items are related to the same relevant features of situation substance.

Some scholars use the term "text-bound equivalence", while others work on "functional equivalence". M. Baker also devotes her work to equivalent types and argues that equivalence is always relative in the sense that it is influenced by many linguistic and cultural factors [1,p.6].

Besides we can distinguish between formal equivalence, semantic equivalence, cultural equivalence and pragmatic equivalence. Formal equivalence designates an area of correspondence ranging around the word, even though involving lower units such as the phoneme or the morpheme. In a bottom-up approach to translation, equivalence at word level is the first element to be taken into consideration by the translator. In fact, when the translator starts analysing the ST he looks at the words as single units in order to find a direct equivalent term in the TL.

Semantic equivalence relies on the preservation of many semantic criteria: denotation, connotation and propositional content. So, words which do not have the same equivalent meanings can be translated by "explanatory expressions" as a way of compensation.

Cultural equivalence aims at the reproduction of whatever cultural features the ST holds into the TT. These vary from things specific to the geographical situation, the climate, the history, the tradition, the religion, the interpersonal behaviour to any cultural event having an effect on the language community [2,p.177].

It is clear from this definition that cultural equivalence consists of the rendition of the SL cultural features into the TL in a way that helps the reader understand these foreign cultural features through his own cultural ones. Actually, cultural equivalence can be easily reached in case the cultural words under translation are universally known. However, this can be diminished with cultural differences that languages may have.

Pragmatic equivalence tends to reproduce the context and text goals of the SL. It subsumes all of the semio-pragmatic-communicative layers of communication.

Examples of these semiotic and communicative dimensions are genre, field, mode, tenor, text type and translation purpose. Pragmatic equivalence refers to implicatures and strategies of avoidance during the translation process. Implicature is not about what is explicitly said but what is implied. Therefore, the translator needs to work out implied meanings in translation in order to get the ST message across. The role of the translator is to recreate the author's intention in another culture in such a way that enables the TC reader to understand it clearly.

However, some scholars oppose the idea of equivalence in translation as a form of linguistic synonymy, ensuring that the latter does not exist even with words of the same

language. Besides, van den Broek rejects terms like similarity, analogy, adequacy, invariance and congruence, and the implications they may have in translation.

Sometimes the term "equivalence" is redefined by the concept of "true understanding". Besides it not only distorts the basic problem of translation, but also obstructs the development of a descriptive theory of translation. M. Mehrach also considers equivalence as an impossible aim in translation. He corroborates his saying by the idea that no two languages share the same linguistic structures, and social or cultural aspects. Instead, he proposes the use of the term "adequacy" as a reference for the "appropriate" translation, that is, "a translation that has achieved the required optimal level of interlanguage communication under certain given conditions" [3,p.16].

It is clear from the above conflicting views and theories that the notion of equivalence is arbitrary and relative as well. It is, in fact, difficult to determine since no one could objectively define the point at which the TT becomes equal to the ST. The notion of equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most problematic and controversial areas in the field of translation theory. The term has caused, and it seems quite probable that it will continue to cause, heated debates within the field of translation studies. This term has been analysed, evaluated and extensively discussed from different points of view and has been approached from many different perspectives. The first discussions of the notion of equivalence in translation initiated the further elaboration of the term by contemporary theorists. Even the brief outline of the issue given above indicates its importance within the framework of the theoretical reflection on translation. The difficulty in defining equivalence seems to result in the impossibility of having a universal approach to this notion.

Литература

1. *Baker M. The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies, Part II: History and Traditions. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. – pp. 320.*

2. *Bayar M. To Mean or Not to Mean. Kadmous cultural foundation. Khatawat for publishing and distribution. Damascus, Syria, 2007. – pp. 223.*

3. *Mehrach M. Towards a Text-Based Model for Translation Evaluation. – Ridderkerk: Ridden print, 1977. – pp. 44.*

4. *Munday J. Introducing Translation Studies, Theories and Applications. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. – pp. 222.*

5. *Nida Eugene A. Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles Involved in Bible Translating. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964. – pp.331.*